

The Balikbayan Story



The flight is long but she could not get to sleep. She keeps picturing the image of her daughter whom she had not seen for three years now but the pain on her forehead from the latest bruise she got as a remembrance from her recent employer keeps her from concentrating. No matter, those would be surely forgotten once she sees her daughter again and show her the latest mobile phone she bought for her. From the plane window, the familiar airport runway can be seen and she hassled to review the speech she ought to say to make her neighbors green with envy. She reapplied her makeup and flinched as she pressed more powder over her arm bruises.

Three seats behind her, the same mixed set of emotions are mirrored on his face. He has been waiting for years to come home, imagining his family's surprised faces when he appears at their door with gifts and chocolates he bought from Qatar with his 2 years savings. All the times that he did not eat dinner was worth it if it means those packages in the baggage cabin can bring smiles to his children's faces.

Not far from the balikbayan box that carries his packages, a larger brown rectangular-shaped container carries a body, now already all rigid and almost unrecognizable with the amount of formalin and make up the morgue had applied. She had been dead for a month now but the stab wounds and scratches are still visible on her arms and neck, the parts of her body not concealed by her worn out

death gown. Her family is probably in the waiting area in the airport right now, not knowing how to react when her dull brown casket is wheeled into the arrival area.

These are normal stories known to happen to migrant workers who are miles from home for years and are finally going back home. Manila, Jakarta and Sri Lankan Airports are filled with these stories, some a little more dramatic than others. In the Philippines it normal when you are working at the airport.

These overseas workers are called New Heroes by their country since they are the determining factor in the boost in economy. They are respected and looked up to by their neighbors but some of them are ridiculed, abused, slaved and raped in the foreign country which pays them dinars, dollars and real. These currencies strengthen their country's foreign exchange so they don't have the right to complain.

After all, it would one day end, wouldn't it?

Source: <http://www.sinclairjames.org/balikbayan-story/>